

Tips on Mentoring for Department Chairs: Helping Faculty Pursue Funded Research

Based on Center for Excellence in Research Workshop, February 2, 2011:

Margy Gatz, Michael Stallcup and Carolee Winstein Presenters

Department chairs can contribute to the academic success of their departments in many ways, including helping their faculty obtain funding to support their research. Funding is available in almost all academic areas, and can be obtained when chairs create a mutually supportive environment. In doing so, departments can expand their resources to attract more and better students, catalyze research activity and raise their academic reputation.

At this CER workshop, department chairs discussed ways to:

- Encourage faculty to write proposals
- Help faculty write better proposals

Encouraging Faculty to Write Proposals

- ❖ Set a role model: be experienced & successful in obtaining funding or receiving proposals and convey that as a role model to others.
- ❖ Create an internal newsletter- document success, funding, and publications and circulate to the faculty.
- ❖ Distribute information on funding opportunities to faculty.
- ❖ Connect faculty to build/create collaborations, leading to funding. These collaborations can be both within and between departments.
- ❖ Develop clear load guidelines that correlate teaching or other assignments with research funding (e.g., consider amount of funding, overhead recovery, or charging academic effort in assignments).
- ❖ Account for pursuit of funding in annual merit review.
- ❖ Ensure that space is assigned according to research activity.

Helping Faculty Write Better Proposals

- ❖ Encourage faculty to attend workshops offered by USC, such as CER, which train faculty in proposal writing.
- ❖ Support and fund faculty attendance at discipline-specific proposal preparation workshops, which are offered around the country. For example, rehabilitation research offers the ERRIS workshop: <http://erris.med.virginia.edu/>.
- ❖ Make faculty aware of online resources. NIH offers a workshop, available via audio, to learn about their new format. Make sure that faculty are aware of, and utilize, Community of Science, as well as other services that automatically notify them of research opportunities.
- ❖ Support and fund faculty to meet program officers that have the capability to support their research.
- ❖ Nominate faculty to serve on proposal review panels so they can learn how proposals are critiqued and selected.
- ❖ Share copies of successful proposals, and share copies of reviewer critiques for both successful and unsuccessful proposals.
- ❖ Ensure that every junior faculty member has a mentor who knows how/what to put into the grant. Mentor may be in same or related field to help with relevance → show impact

- ❖ Be willing to carefully & thoroughly critique proposals. Chairs need to find someone to critique & help make proposals better.
- ❖ Create a pre-submission proposal process:
 - ❖ Specific aim- pilot data → to evaluate aim
 - ❖ Once you get feedback- even competitive renewal, write specific aims
 - ❖ Submit full proposal (2.5 months prior)
 - ❖ Set up meetings to critique and discuss proposals prior to submission
 - ❖ Send proposals externally for review; offer an honorarium (e.g., \$300) for a review
- ❖ Make sure that faculty have adequate administrative support for budget preparation or other administrative tasks. Use administrative staff to educate faculty in the mechanics of proposal preparation, and ensure staff are available to work with faculty.
- ❖ Encourage faculty to ask for help; stress importance of getting this done well in advance of the deadline, not at the last minute.

Summary

- 1) Set a role model, and reward faculty
- 2) Make faculty aware of funding opportunities, training workshops inside and outside the university, and on-line resources.
- 3) Support faculty, so they can meet program officers and training workshops.
- 4) Make sure that all junior faculty have mentors who can offer support.
- 5) Create an internal proposal review process, and stress completion of proposals well in advance of deadlines.
- 6) Make sure faculty have access to adequate administrative support for proposal preparation and grants management.

And, contact your department chair peers to learn what they are doing to support their faculty.